

# **Injuries in Missouri**

## **A Public Health Approach to Injury Prevention**

# Focus on Public Health

## A Public Health Approach to Injury Prevention

Many individuals and groups in Missouri still consider most injuries to be a result of an “accident” (a set of random, uncontrollable factors). However, most injuries are preventable and factors leading to injuries can be controlled. Injuries resulting from assaults and self inflicted injuries can also be prevented and reduced to a greater degree through concerted state and community efforts.

State and local health departments have been charged with responsibility for the frontline defense of the public’s health. Because public health addresses the diverse causes of injury (e.g., traffic, falls, sports, violence, drowning) and because of an existing and established leadership role, health departments are an appropriate group to coordinate or facilitate state and local injury prevention efforts. The injury problem is too large and too diverse for any one group to address alone and there are many other disciplines, agencies, and organizations currently involved and important in injury prevention, education, and policy development. As a result, coordination and collaboration are essential to prevent duplication and fragmentation of interventions.

*Statewide and local injury data collection.* Public health surveillance and monitoring of health behavior and conditions form the basic foundation of public health. Regular collection and analysis of information related to emerging patterns of injury morbidity, mortality, and disability, associated costs, and prevalence of injury-related risk factors and behavioral patterns are

essential. Outcomes of program interventions are often evaluated by surveillance data.

*Program development and implementation.* Today, with widespread implementation, there are many proven effective and cost-effective injury prevention strategies that could greatly reduce injury incidence and associated societal costs. Injury prevention program development and implementation are based on local and state data and, in general, are delivered at the community level. Successful programs are multifaceted and use a combination of approaches. The involvement of communities in program planning, implementation, and evaluation is critical. Surveillance data are integral, not only in the development of prevention programs, but also in the evaluation of such programs.

*Policy development.* Public health policies may be reflected in legislation or the establishment of regulations or standards occurring on many levels. Injury surveillance data is critical to drive the development and evaluation of policy initiatives. There have been many successful injury prevention policy efforts (i.e., mandatory child restraint legislation, flame-retardant clothing); however, there is great potential for new policy initiatives that can be initiated at the state and local level.

*Evaluation.* Accountability and quality assurance activities are necessary and integral components of any state and local injury prevention efforts. The evaluation is designed as a part of the program design or policy initiative. While statistical reduction in injury morbidity and mortality may not be feasible at the

# Focus on Public Health

community level, other outcome measures (impact of bicycle helmet use, smoke detector prevalence) should always be evaluated. When feasible, states should determine cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness of injury prevention programs.

*Professional training and education.* Because of the diversity of potential professionals addressing injury prevention (i.e. emergency medical services, law enforcement, schools), a special emphasis is needed on training public health and other professionals from all relevant disciplines regarding the comprehensive public health approach to injury prevention. Links between education and practice settings are crucial in order to serve competency-based, cost-beneficial injury prevention programs.

*Public information and educational programs.* An important population-based function of public health is to serve as the health educator of the public. To reduce injury risk factors, the public must be alerted regarding the potential adverse outcomes of high risk behaviors and benefits of safety behaviors. These efforts can best be targeted to children but also must target legislators and the public at large.

*Ensuring the protection and health of the population by investigating injury clusters or events.* An important function of state-wide injury surveillance data is to alert injury control officials regarding injury clusters or real and/or potential injury hazards; these events must be thoroughly investigated to identify risk factors and appropriate action taken to insure the protection of the public's health. To be effective, these processes need to occur on a timely basis.